

Prices To Pay

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****Classification:**** Adventure (Gen)

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****Warnings:**** Spoilers, violence but no sex (okay, one m/f kiss) is present in this fanfic.

****Summary:**** Xena, Gabrielle and Eve go to rescue Joxer from being tortured in the afterlife, with the help of Ares and Aphrodite.

****Title:**** Prices To Pay

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><p>Three women were walking along together, near the outskirts of a small village. Their names were Xena, Gabrielle and Eve, and they were now possibly the most famous - or infamous - people in ancient Greece.<p>

It had not been long since Xena, the warrior princess had become the Slayer of Olympian gods, using an ability bestowed from the higher powers to help protect her daughter Eve. Xena hadn't wanted to become a killer again, but with both Eve's and Gabrielle's lives at stake she'd had no other choice.

Gabrielle - bard, Amazon Queen and Xena's soulmate - had been telling stories to Eve about the old days as they walked, and it was obvious that Xena's daughter was enjoying every second of it.

It was a welcome change; Eve, who had known herself as Livia of Rome for nearly all of her existence, was still trying to adjust to everything that had happened to her, after Xena and Gabrielle had re-entered her life.

To her best friend's great embarrassment, Gabrielle was now talking about the men who had been Xena's boyfriends - or at least, the warrior princess had been intimate with. "Gabrielle, I really don't think Eve wants to hear this right now..." Xena started to say.

"No, no!" Eve said with a smile. "I DO want to hear this!"

Xena frowned, as Gabrielle grinned wickedly and said, "Let's see now, I've told you about Marcus, Borias, Hercules, Ulysses AND Marc Antony...but did you know about Rafe?"

"He doesn't count!" Xena said sharply.

"Who was he?" said Eve, ignoring her mother.

"Oh, he was a con man. Pretty handsome one too, if I remember right..." Gabrielle mock-sighed, as Xena glared daggers at her best friend.

"When and where did you meet him?" Eve excitedly wanted to know.

Gabrielle recalled, "Lemme see...we first met up with him - oh, yeah, it was just after he and his partner were responsible for getting Joxer beaten up by..." She then cut herself off.

There was an uncomfortable silence, as the three of them recalled the man in question. The bard and the warrior princess thought of the loyal friend they had loved like a brother, both in this time and 25 years ago. Eve likewise thought about the old man that she had mercilessly slaughtered, a few weeks before.

It still made Eve want to be ill, when she thought about killing Joxer now. In her identity as Livia, she had actually done much worse, to lots of others countless times before, but this death was...different.

Suddenly Gabrielle broke the silence. "I'm sorry," she said. Turning to Eve she continued, "Look, it's okay. Joxer's at peace now, like I said before -"

Suddenly there was a flash of light, and a winged man was standing before them. Gabrielle and Xena immediately recognized him. "Cupid!" exclaimed Gabrielle.

The love god stared at the three women, and they immediately understood how angry he was over what had happened. He inclined his head slightly only to the bard. "Gabrielle."

Xena commented wryly, with her hand on her chakram, "I take it this isn't a social call?"

Cupid stared at her. "No."

Gabrielle started to say, "Look, if this is about..."

Cupid interrupted her, "It isn't. I thought you three knew that the gods - at least, those of us left alive - have learned not to mess with the Slayer, or her family."

Xena winced at the nickname - it reminded her too much of her old title, the 'Destroyer of Nations'. "Cupid..."

The god continued, "Of course, you understand that with the Twilight of the Gods upon us, I didn't care much about myself anymore. It's just that my son, Bliss - he's not going to get the chance to grow up, and experience everything his parents did, is he?"

"I don't know," said Eve sincerely.

Cupid merely snorted. "Let's stick to business. My mother Aphrodite wants to see you. She said it's urgent, for whatever that's worth nowadays." He then disappeared in a shower of light.

Xena looked thoughtful. "Doesn't sound good."

Gabrielle asked, "Should we go see her?"

Eve put in, "She helped save our lives. It's the least we can do."

* * *

><p>Xena, Eve and Gabrielle soon found one of Aphrodite's temples, and went inside. Aphrodite appeared in a soft sparkle of light, and smiled wearily at them. "Hi there, gals. Good to see ya."<p>

Xena asked softly, "We're here - what's up?"

Aphrodite didn't reply immediately - plus she looked guilty, and Xena instantly didn't like it. "Uh..." started the Goddess of Love.

Gabrielle had also understood something was wrong, almost as fast as Xena had. "What is it?" she demanded.

Aphrodite started to explain it to her. "Well...little one, you remember when the Furies were driving you nuts to kill Eve, they summoned up Joxer and Hope?"

Gabrielle stiffened, as the memories were still very painful in her mind. "That wasn't just some trick that the Furies did?" she replied cautiously. "That was real?"

"Sorry, but yeah. The words you were hearing did come from the

Furies, but...like, the two of them really were there for a while. Had to be, for the ultimate effect. Uh, the thing is..." Aphrodite stopped, she continued. "Nobody paid attention to what happened with them after the fight, and when Xena carried you and her kid outta that burning building."

Gabrielle had gone pale, horribly certain she knew what Aphrodite was going to say. The goddess confirmed her worst suspicions when she said sadly, "The bottom line is...hate to tell ya this, sweetie, but your brat took Jox with her, after the Furies were done with 'em."

Gabrielle screamed, "NO! How could you let that happen?"

Aphrodite simply shrugged, reminding her about how busy they'd all been at the time, just trying to survive. "And now Joxer has to pay the price for that?" asked Xena dangerously.

Aphrodite shrugged again. "There's nothing I can do about it now. But the big dork used to be one of my fave worshippers, and you're right, he didn't deserve what he got."

Eve, who had been silent up till now, asked, "Why are you telling us this - really?"

Aphrodite replied, "It's just that...I thought Xena and Gabrielle might wanna do something about it, I suppose."

Gabrielle was looking angry enough almost to kill. "You bet we're gonna do something about it!"

Xena cut in, "All right - so where do we have to go to find him?"

Aphrodite looked at her. "Well, Joxer's dead, duh? Where do you think?"

Xena simply nodded, and left immediately after a curt thank-you. Gabrielle followed her. Eve stood there for a moment though and asked Aphrodite, "All the remaining gods still want to kill me, don't they?"

Aphrodite just stared at her. "Thought so," said Eve and left.

* * *

><p>Later that day, the three were in a forest, having made camp. Xena decided she needed some time alone, to think. "I'm just going for a little walk," she told her daughter and her best friend.<p>

Gabrielle and Eve didn't argue with her. A few minutes later, alone amongst the trees, Xena stopped. She could feel someone near. She leaned over and grabbed whoever it was out of the bushes - and to her shock, it was Ares, the former God of War.

The mortal simply shrugged, and grinned at her. "Xena."

The warrior princess matched his tone precisely, releasing him. "Ares. Why are you following us? Because Eve still isn't all that

thrilled with you, y'know, even if you did save her life. And Gabrielle's."

Ares looked smug. "Personal business," he said.

Xena knew that that wasn't all there was to it. "Such as?"

Ares simply ignored the question. "Encountered the assassins yet?" he asked casually, pacing around and changing the subject.

Xena was starting to get alarmed. "What assassins?"

Ares didn't answer her directly, he just casually mentioned how Joxer's relatives had become enraged at the news of his murder. "But then, what did you expect? Oh yeah, that brother of his - Jett? He was REALLY pissed."

"Jett..." Xena echoed.

Ares continued with a smile, "Yeah, I figured you'd remember him. Went around for over a week, getting everyone stirred up - or so they told me. Rumor is, he got practically the entire family in Athens to swear a blood oath to avenge your doofus pal Joxer, when they learned what happened from that kid of his, Virgil. What's her name - Meg? - she was still too nuts to tell them much of anything."

Xena looked sick. She knew that Joxer's widow and son had every right to be upset, but she had hoped that this sort of thing could be avoided. No such luck.

Ares knew her well enough to know exactly what she was thinking. He said mockingly, "It's been 25 years Xena, but things haven't changed THAT much."

Xena asked, "Do you know what Jett's planning?"

Ares shook his head. "Almost nothing. But if the King of Assassins - or at least I think he still has the title - is gonna come after you guys, I wouldn't wanna be in your shoes."

"Really? Why is that, exactly?" she snapped.

"'Cause Joxer isn't around to control him anymore, and help save your asses. Why else?" he leered at her.

Xena felt the anger soaring within her. She hated the fact that Ares knew exactly how to push her buttons like this, but forced herself to keep quiet to see what else he knew.

Ares simply laughed and continued, "Oh, come on! Don't tell me you're surprised? Did you know how many people wanted to hire him, to kill you and your blonde sidekick back then? Only reason he didn't do it, was because he couldn't bear to hurt that idiot brother of his. But now, things are different."

Xena just stared at the former god. "So what now?" she asked him.

Ares said enigmatically, "I heard what you three were planning to do. Best of luck..." before he turned around and disappeared out of

sight.

* * *

><p>Xena was worried, as she went back to camp. She told Gabrielle and Eve about the meeting with Ares, and the trio agreed to take turns keeping watch that night.<p>

The next morning, as Gabrielle and Xena were getting up, Eve finally relaxed. Just then Gabrielle tensed, and dove forward and barely managed to push Eve out of the way of a black arrow, that suddenly came flying out of nowhere.

Then a hooded, masked man in black leather appeared, hurling a blade at Eve's heart. Xena caught it, and threw it straight back at him. He ducked to avoid the weapon, and then turned to run.

Xena was damned if she was just going to let the assassin escape like that. She quickly caught up with him, and a short and extremely dirty hand-to-hand fight took place. She eventually kicked him in the balls, after he had gotten her in the thigh and left kneecap.

The killer screamed in agony, and she took advantage of the situation to knock him out. Limping, she dragged him back to the camp. Eve and Gabrielle removed the headgear after tying him up, while Xena recovered from the fight.

Xena, Eve and Gabrielle all gasped when they saw his face - the man looked enough like Joxer's son Virgil, to be his younger brother. They were some differences, of course - for one thing, the hair color wasn't the same - but the resemblance couldn't be a coincidence.

"Who are you?" Xena demanded, although she could guess.

The man looked at Xena and sneered. "Why should I answer that?" He then spat out, "You may look like a younger version of Aunt Meg, but you're not even half the woman she was!"

Gabrielle understood instantly. "You're Jett's son..."

He snarled at her. "And you're the Amazon harlot my uncle died for, you...!"

Gabrielle tried to explain things to him, but it was obvious he wasn't interested in hearing anything she had to say. "What's your name?" Eve asked quietly.

He replied angrily to her, "Doesn't matter. But I promise you, your days are numbered 'cause of what you did - you do know that, right? Uncle Joxer was one of my favorite relatives. Even though I'll die here today, someone in the family WILL get you eventually for killing him."

Eve looked at her mother. "You weren't wrong," she said, referring to both what Xena had told her and Gabrielle the previous day, and Xena's comment that she ne
>eded to get used to this sort of thing when they'd last seen Virgil.<p>

Xena smiled tightly and said to Jett junior, "Well, if you're an example of what's to come, I'm not gonna be too worried." Then she knocked him out again.

* * *

><p>Later Xena, Gabrielle and Eve arrived at the lake Xena had previously used to enter the Underworld, the realm of the dead. "Eve?" said Xena.<p>

"Yes, mother?"

Xena paused, happy to hear her daughter getting used to calling her that. "Are you all right?"

Eve looked at them both, and sighed. "I guess. But my faith in things is a little..."

Gabrielle went over to her. "Look, that assassin is safely locked up now, there's no need to worry about..."

Eve interrupted her, "Yes, but for how long? I'm a much bigger danger to both of you now. I don't want you two getting hurt because of me! The price for that is too high...maybe after all this is over, we should split up..."

"NO!" exclaimed Xena. She took Eve by the shoulders, and looked her in the eye. "I'm your mother. I lost you for 25 years after Ares put Gabrielle and me in that damned ice tomb! You are NOT getting rid of us because of this, understand? We'll face whatever happens together."

Eve smiled, and embraced her. They all then dove into the lake and eventually arrived, dripping wet, at the entrance to the Underworld.

Charon, the ferryman was there grumbling to himself as he waited to take the souls of the dead across the river Styx, to the Elysian fields or Tartarus. He took one look at Xena, and groaned. "No! Not you again!"

Xena smiled in genuine amusement. "Good to see you too, Charon."

The ferryman didn't share her feelings. "I am NOT doing this again! When are you gonna die, anyway?"

"Hey!" said Gabrielle.

"Don't you hey me, blondie - do you have any IDEA how much trouble she's gotten me into in the past?"

"Wasn't that over 25 years ago?" Eve asked.

Charon brushed that aside. "Details!"

"Look, we just want passage..." started Xena.

"No! And there's nothing you can do to make me!"

All of a sudden, Ares showed up out of the shadows. "You better do

what she says, Charon..." he said menacingly.

"Or what?" Charon said belligerently. "Hades is gone now, y'know!"

Ares smirked. "And maybe if I whisper a few words in the right ears, you'll take over his job..."

As Charon considered this, Xena whispered to Ares, "He doesn't know you gave up your immortality for us, does he?"

Ares kept on smirking. "Well, I figure what he doesn't know can't hurt him."

Suddenly the ferryman turned around and grumbled at them, "So? Hurry up, I haven't got all day!"

The four could not help grinning as they got onto the boat, and they shoved off.

* * *

><p>After the ride, they had walked a little way in the dark tunnels when Xena got Ares alone, and asked him why he was there. "I have my reasons," he said.<p>

"Such as?"

"A little insurance, for one," Ares replied vaguely.

Xena had had enough. Despite everything he had done for her, saving Eve and Gabrielle during the last battle with the Olympian gods, she knew he wasn't exactly trustworthy - mortal or otherwise. So she took her chakram and put it to his throat. "Start talking!" she ordered threateningly.

Ares grinned and nodded, as she lowered the weapon. "Ooh, Xena. You're lucky I've got a thing for you! Okay, Aphrodite asked me to help you in your little mercy mission...and in return, my little sis told me where Hades had hidden some ambrosia, if I wanted it."

Xena moved away from him. "Do you believe me?" Ares asked.

"Yes." Xena replied shortly.

"You mean, you didn't think I was doing this just because I'm a nice guy?"

Xena stared at him in amazement. "Never in a million years." Ares just chuckled.

Later, the four stopped at a blank spot in the tunnel walls and Ares said, "Ah, here we are. Now, we just gotta wait a few minutes."

"Why?" asked Eve.

"Because."

"Because why? What are you up to?" Eve was suspicious, and didn't

bother to hide it.

Ares looked bored. "Anyone ever tell you how annoying the attitude can get?"

"YOU-!"

Suddenly a glowing portal appeared in the stone wall, and Ares said, "Good, right on time. Okay, look, this is a gateway to Hope's little home away from home. Aphrodite said she heard that Joxer's in there."

"Really?" asked Xena.

He ignored that and continued, "Listen, you only got one chance at this - 'cause when you come out again, that door is gonna seal itself shut. So, don't screw up. Right, my job here is done. Goodbye and good luck." He turned to walk off.

"Wait!" commanded Xena. "You're not leaving until we're sure whether he's in there."

All of a sudden, they heard the faint sound of someone screaming, coming through the portal. It was a man's voice. Eve said, "No! What do you think is happening to him?"

All three women shuddered, as they went to a very scary mental place. Then Eve noticed the former war god had vanished. "Ares - he's gone!"

Xena didn't seem concerned. "Doesn't matter. Now, let's go get Joxer."

They went through the portal, and instantly became drenched with sweat. There were blazing fires everywhere, and the smell of fear and death was heavy in the air. They started looking, but they had no idea even in which direction to go.

Soon Hope materialized, her body the mirror image of Gabrielle's - apart from the long, blonde hair. "Hello, mother," she said calmly to the bard.

"Hope!" Gabrielle exclaimed. "How could you DO this?"

"Do what, mother?"

"Kidnap Joxer, and whatever else you've done to him!" said Xena viciously.

"Me? I didn't kidnap him," Hope said in that same calm tone. "Your friend said he was worried about me. Hmm - maybe he thought I was you, mother?" She shrugged. "I don't know. Anyway, he followed me. And when we got here, the others took him."

"What others?" asked Eve curiously.

Hope shrugged again. "I can't explain. And you probably wouldn't believe me, even if I did."

Xena couldn't argue with that. "We came here to get him out. Are you

going to try to stop us?"

Hope looked at her. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't?"

Eve said quickly, "Ares is outside through there," gesturing towards the portal. "If you hurry, you might be able to catch him." She grinned in anticipation.

Hope looked at her and said, "Good enough." With the history she and Ares shared, she quickly disappeared in a burst of flames.

Xena looked at her daughter in admiration. "Eve..."

"What?"

"Never mind." The three of them started moving as quickly as they could, searching for Joxer and wanting to get out of here fast.

Eventually, they found him. Joxer was...a mess; even though he was deceased, just a shade of the living man they'd known, in this realm he was solid and real, and he'd been tortured by experts. One of his eyes was missing, and there was an incredible number of broken bones and bloody lacerations.

Joxer was feebly struggling against his bonds, and moaning incoherently. Thus Xena reluctantly had to knock him unconscious, before the four could escape back into the relative safety of the Underworld...

* * *

><p>Eve, Xena and Gabrielle were carrying Joxer along through the cold dark passageway, trying to find a way to send him to the Elysian fields. Xena was trying not to think too much beyond that, but she couldn't help noticing the professionalism that gone into breaking her friend. Even at her worst, she knew she couldn't have done a better job.<p>

Eve couldn't make herself look at Joxer, the guilt was almost overwhelming.

Gabrielle too had managed to look at him only briefly, unable to prevent herself imagining all the horrors that had been inflicted on this man because he had loved her, and died for her.

Suddenly, Joxer started to moan again. They put him down, and Xena tried to rouse him.

Joxer woke up, at least sort of. Still in a daze, he said "Meg?" and suddenly kissed her passionately.

Xena pushed him away, aware that Gabrielle and Eve could not help grinning widely. She said sternly, "Joxer, knock it off! It's me, Xena!"

He looked at her more closely, and then screamed in fear, the sound echoing off the walls. "NO! NO!" He tried to scramble away.

Gabrielle and Eve then stepped forward, drawing attention to themselves. "Joxer..." started Gabrielle.

Joxer looked at her, and started screaming louder. Eve covered his mouth, she didn't want him attracting attention if anyone was following them. She could easily see the raw fear and terror in his eyes, though. "What's wrong?" she asked him.

"Livia?" he asked in fear and wonder, when she took her hand away.

Eve winced. "Joxer, my name is Eve. You knew that, remember? That's who I...I've changed...I'm sorry for what I..."

He cut her off, saying, "Don't let them hurt me. Please. Please!" he begged her.

"Hey, it's okay, they won't harm you! I mean, it's Gabrielle - and Xena, my mother. They're your friends, they love you! Don't you remember them?"

Joxer tried to believe her, but he couldn't even look at the other two women. "Joxer..." said Gabrielle again, hopelessly. Joxer just closed his good eye and shook his head, again trying to move away.

Xena decided to get them all moving again, with Eve helping to support Joxer, as she was the only one he would let come near him. As they were walking along, the other two women tried to draw Joxer out, but they failed completely.

Eve tried again to apologize to him for everything she had done. "Look, I...I know I can never make up for killing you like that, but I...I have to..."

Joxer just nodded. He whispered, "It's all right."

"No, it's not!" Eve suddenly yelled. They all stopped in surprise, in the middle of a fairly large cavern. "You...you were my Uncle Joxer when I was a baby! You would have died for me, or mother, or Gabrielle, and what did I do when I grew up? I KILLED you! It's NOT all right! You paid a price for my actions that you NEVER should have had to..."

"Eve..." Xena started to say.

Gabrielle caught her eye, and she stopped. The bard then asked simply, "What's happened to you, Joxer?"

Joxer was getting better; or at least, the old man didn't flinch away from her again. He said in broken sentences, "I dunno for sure anymore, I...they, they tortured me. They tortured me in a hundred different ways. More, maybe? They - they made me see them as people I cared about...you, Xena, Virgil, my brothers...but not Livia, I mean Eve, never her..."

"Why?" asked Xena softly. "What do they want? And who ARE they?"

"They...never told me. I...I guess...I guess they were people who

probably couldn't get to you or Gabby, so they kinda just settled for me..."

"No," said Eve suddenly. "No, I don't think it's that simple."

They all turned to look at her. "What do you mean?" asked Gabrielle.

Eve said slowly to her, "Well, it just doesn't make sense. Not about the torture - I mean, why bother to look like you and my mother? It's like they wanted him to...to hate the sight of you. To destroy all the love for you and the others that he had - to...turn him away from the Way of Love..."

Joxer frowned. "I don't get it."

Eve was starting to get excited, she was sure she was on the right track. "Think about it! Mother, Gabrielle, you remember all the stories you told me about what happened to you in India? Every life we ever have, I think Joxer is supposed to be there with you, helping you. These people wanted to change that - to corrupt his soul, to make him hate - to make him evil! It would end up changing everything!"

Just then a number of massive black shapes seem to appear out of nowhere, cutting off any chance of escape. "Enough talk," a deep, growling voice issued from one of them.

After a moment Joxer stepped forward, with Eve's help. For the first time, despite his maimed body, he seemed almost to tower with determination. "It's not gonna work. I know your plan now! You can do whatever you like to me, but what you guys want will never happen! I won't hate them - like, I'll belong to the way of love forever!"

A great roar issued forth from his enemies, one of terrible rage and anger. Just as Joxer resigned himself to his fate, a bright light suddenly seemed to come shining out of nowhere, right on top of him.

The black shapes hissed and recoiled from the light, but not too far away. Eve was stunned - this was the same sort of light that had appeared once before, to show her the truth of her past in Eli's temple, and set her on the road to the Way of Love.

Joxer was staring into the light, also stunned by what had happened. But then his expression became one of complete joy and happiness, as all of his wounds suddenly vanished. The old man stood there, whole and healthy, as Eve stepped back and rejoined the others.

Joxer glanced at the three women and said with a loving smile, "Goodbye, Xena, Eve, Gabby. See you in the next life..." He then turned his head again, fascinated by what he saw, and quickly started floating towards the light. As he came closer to it, he started to become translucent, and transparent.

Slowly the light disappeared, taking Joxer with it. Then the three women looked around, fully aware that Joxer's torturers were still there. The malignant black shapes advanced closer, and their fury at losing their prize was obvious.

Eve, Gabrielle and Xena drew their weapons, positioning themselves back to back. They had no illusions about what was going to happen, but they were determined to at least go out fighting.

Suddenly though, a different, blazing white light seemed blanket everything, and all three of them instantly lost consciousness.

* * *

><p>The three women woke up at the same time, at the shore of the same lake they had come to not long before. They got up, and Gabrielle looked around in wonder. Then she looked at Eve and Xena and asked, "Did all of that really just happen?"<p>

Xena looked at her and said, "You mean about rescuing Joxer, helping save him from those...things?"

Eve looked at them both and said, "If all three of us remember it, then yeah, it must have."

Gabrielle asked thoughtfully, "Um, do you think Ares made it out okay?"

Xena gave a short laugh. "Only if he was fast enough to avoid Hope." She then looked at her daughter protectively. "Eve, are you all right?" she asked, moving close.

"Yeah," Eve sighed. "Actually, this whole thing...it's renewed my faith. In the Way of Love. Maybe I CAN find redemption one day."

Xena and Gabrielle silently agreed instantly, giving their daughter a big hug.

THE END

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file.